



# *Stories & Anecdotes*

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# Agasthya

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Compiled By P. R. Ramachander

## Birth of Agasthya

Once up on a time Mithra (Sun) and Varuna (the God of rain) happened to fall in love with the celestial nymph Urvasi. On seeing the pretty dancer, their semen leaked out of them and this was preserved in a pitcher. Out of the pitcher was born two great sages - Agasthya and Vasishta. Together they were called Maithra Varunas. Because he was born out of a pitcher, Agasthya was also called Kumbha Sambhava or Kumbha muni. He was supposed to have existed some 4000 years before the commencement of Kali Yuga and is believed to be still living in Tamil Nadu by devotees.

A folk lore in the Sidha Medicine has a different story to tell. It Says that Sage Agasthiyar was born about 4573 years prior to the commencement of Kali Yuga at a place in Gujarat. His father Bhargava (Savithru - one of the 14 Adithyas) was well learned while his mother Indumathi was from Punjab on the banks of the Indus River. They were both devotees of the Pasupatha order of the sage Rishabha Muni.

## Education

Sage Agasthya was supposed to be one of the very learned sages of his time. Nothing much is known as to who were his Guru etc. In many Puranas, he is being taught by Sage Hayagreeva, who was one of the incarnations of Vishnu. In fact the great Lalitha Sahasranama Stotram and Lalitha Trishathi were taught to him by Sage Hayagreeva at the express orders of Goddess Lalitha Tripura Sundari to Sage Hayagreeva. Sage Drona who was a teacher of Pandavas learned the art of war from his Guru Agni Vesa, who himself is supposed to have learnt it from Sage Agasthya. Sage Agasthya was the one who is credited to have written the first book of grammar of the Tamil language. He also has been credited to have found and popularized the Sidha system of medicine in Tamil Nadu. He is also supposed to be the founder of the Nadi astrology of Tamil Nadu. The Keralites claim, that he was the one who was responsible for teaching them the martial art of Kalari Payittu.

## Marriage

One day Sage Agasthya was traveling through the forest and his Pithru devathas (Manes) were found hanging upside down on forest trees. When he asked them, why this fate came to them, they replied, that since Agasthya did not have a son, they were forced to undergo this type of suffering. Agasthya

promised them that he would get married. He collected all that is good from every being on earth and created a baby girl. At that time the king of Vidharbha was doing great penance to get a child. Agasthya presented the king with the baby he had created. She was named as Lopa Mudhra and brought up under great luxurious circumstances. When she reached marriageable age, Agasthya requested her hand in marriage from the king of Vidharbha. Though the king was terribly afraid of the sage, he indicated to him, that he is not willing to give his daughter in marriage to him. But Lopa Mudhra, told her father that she wanted to marry Agasthya. Since he used to walk on forests and mountains, wanting not to trouble his wife, Agasthya used to give her a micro form and carry her in his pitcher. Due to the wish of Lord Shiva, Agasthya traveled south and settled down there. Due to the very odorous journey that he had to undertake, Lord Shiva gave a boon to Agasthya that his pitcher would be full of water always. At that time, the South India was extremely dry with small streams which were seasonal. Once when Agasthya had gone to take bath and Lord Ganesa took the form of a crow and overturned Agasthya's pitcher. Lopa Mudhra along with the perennial water from the pitcher turned in to the mighty river Kaveri, which is perennial. She was called Kaveri because she was spread by a crow [Kaa (crow) Viri (spread)].

There is yet another story of Sage Agasthya's marriage from South India. It seems there was a hunter king called Kavera near the Brahma Giri mountain ranges of Coorg. His only aim in life was to do good to his country. He did great penance to propitiate Lord Shiva. At last Shiva came in person. Kavera only wanted the good of his people. Lord Shiva blessed him with a daughter called Kaveri and told him that his wish would be fulfilled through her. Sage Agasthya happened to visit Brahma Giri. Kavera then gave his daughter in marriage to Sage Agasthya. Agasthya and Kaveri lead a very happy life there. But at that time due to the tyrannical rule of an Asura called Surapadma, the entire South India was in the grip of a terrible famine. One day while Sage Agasthya was going to take bath, there was no one to care of Kaveri. So he turned her in to water and placed her in his holy pitcher. Lord Ganesa took the form of a crow and upturned the pitcher. The water which came out of the pitcher became a stream and then a very great perennial river called Kaveri.

## **Humbling of Vindhya Mountain**

The greatest mountain in India always was Maha Meru, which literally touches the sky. The Sun and Moon were supposed to go round that mountain. The Vindhya ranges which are in the middle of India got very jealous of this state of affairs and started growing taller and taller. A stage came when the Sun and the moon were not able to travel to the South. So Indra requested Agasthya to do something about it. It was at this time that

Lord Shiva decided to marry Goddess Parvathi. People all over the world started traveling to Himalayas to attend Lord Shiva's marriage. Due to this earth started tilting north wards. God Shiva had to stop this so he requested Sage Agasthya (whom he thought as equal to all people on earth) to travel towards the south, so that the great penance he did will balance the earth. Unwillingly Sage Agasthya traveled to south. On his way he was forced to cross the Vindhya Mountain which was extremely tall. Sage Agasthya requested the Vindhya Mountain to become tiny so that he can easily cross it. The Vindhyas acceded to the request of sage Agasthya. Sage Agasthya requested the mountain to be tiny till he came back to North. The mountain agreed to this also. But sage Agasthya settled in south of India and never went back.

### **Killing of Vatapi**

After his marriage to Lopa Mudhra, she wanted Sage Agasthya to dress himself in finery and be well ornamented. Since he loved her dearly and since he did not have any wealth to buy the dresses and ornaments, Agasthya is supposed to have approached a king called Srutharva. Unfortunately that king did not have excess wealth to share and so in turn Agasthya approached King Bradhnaswara and Rich man Trasadasyu. Both of them expressed their inability to pay the money required by Agasthya. Then Agasthya was directed to approach, a very rich Rakshasa called Ilwala.

Ilwala was living in Manimalpathan along with his brother Vatapi. Once Ilwala had approached a Brahmin sage to bless him with a child. Since the Brahmin sage refused, Ilwala and Vatapi became very angry at Brahmins. Whenever any Brahmin came to their house, Ilwala used to offer them a feast. Vatapi used to take a form of a sheep and this sheep was cut, cooked and served to the Brahmins by Ilwala. Once the Brahmin has eaten his food, Ilwala used to call Vatapi come out. Then Vatapi used to come out tearing the stomach of the Brahmin. The same drama was unfolded before Sage Agasthya. However, when Ilwala called Vatapi come out, Agasthya fondling his stomach, told Digest, Oh Vatapi. Vatapi was digested. Ilwala gave sufficient money to Agasthya.

### **Agasthya Drinks Sea**

When Vruthrasura was troubling the devas, very much, Devendra waged a war against him and killed him by using deceit. Two of his generals of Vruthrasura, Kalakeyas however escaped. Indra requested Agni and Vayu to chase and destroy them. However Kalakeyas went deep in to the sea and hid there. Every day after sunset they used to come out and used to cause lot of trouble to the great sages, Devas and Men. Devas approached Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu told them that the only method of catching them was by

drying the sea and the only one who was capable of doing it was Agasthya. The devas approached Agasthya for help. Agasthya readily agreed and drank all the waters of the sea and made it dry. Kalakeyas were killed. The drying of ocean, lead to famine. Devas again approached Vishnu. Vishnu told them that a king called Bhageeratha would come and fill up the ocean with the water of the Ganges brought from heaven.

### **Agasthya got a golden bangle**

Once Sage Agasthya reached a very huge empty forest. When he walked deep in to the forest he saw some Gandharwas and Apsaras dancing there. Suddenly from their midst a great soul came out. It ate a corpse which was lying there. Then that soul perambulated and saluted Sage Agasthya. He told him as follows, “I am Swetha the son of the great king Vidarbha belonging to the Treta Yuga. I ruled my country for a long time, without doing any charity came to this forest and did Tapas here. Then I left my body and reached heaven. But in heaven I was feeling the pangs of hunger and when I approached Lord Brahma told me that this is because, while in earth, I have not given anything to anybody. He told me to visit this forest daily and eat a corpse lying there to satisfy my hunger. He also told me that when I complete eating 10000 corpses, I would be able to see you and with your blessings get rid of my perennial hunger in the heaven”. Thus saying he presented Sage Agasthya with a golden bangle. Agasthya blessed him.

### **Agasthya cursed King Nahusha**

Devendra killed Vruthrasura by deceit. Because of this a sin engulfed him and he was forced to hide in the earth. At this time a king called Nahusha completed the performance of one hundred Aswamedha Yagas. Because of this he got the position of Indra. Once he started ruling the devas , Nahusha started misbehaving with everybody. He wanted Sachi Devi, the wife of Indra to live with him as his wife. Sachi Devi did not like this at all. She sought the protection of Brahaspathi, the teacher of all devas. Nahusha called Brahaspathi and threatened him. Then Brahaspathi told Sachi Devi that he was helpless and advised her to find out her husband Indra. Sachi Devi told Nahusha that she was willing to obey his whims but she would like to see her husband who was hiding in earth first. Nahusha agreed to this condition. With the help of Goddess Parvathi, Sachi Devi found out Indra. Indra said that unless he gets rid of his sin, he would not be able to come back but he told her to do a trick to get rid of Nahusha. Sachi Devi went back and told Nahusha, that she will receive Nahusha provided he comes to her house in a palanquin carried by the Saptha Rishis (Seven very great sages). The Saptha rishis included Sage Agasthya. Since Nahusha was the king of devas, his order had to be obeyed by them. Since Agasthya was short and fat he was not able to walk fast and the palanquin tilted at his end. Since Nahusha was

in a hurry to reach Sachi Devi's house, Nahusha kept on ordering them, Sarpa, Sarpa (Fast, fast). This infuriated Sage Agasthya and he cursed that Nahusha would indeed become a Sarpa (snake). Nahusha then craved for forgiveness of Agasthya. Sage Agasthya told him that Nahusha would get salvation on seeing his descendants, the Pandavas in the forest.

### **Agasthya helped Lord Rama**

During his sojourn in the forests Lord Rama along with Lakshmana and Sita is supposed to have visited the hermitage of Agasthya and stayed there. They also took his advice as where they should live in the forests.

During the war with Ravana in Sri Lanka, Lord Rama fought with Ravana for a long time and was tired and was not able to kill Ravana. At that stage the devas sent sage Agasthya to advise him. Sage Agasthya then taught Lord Rama, a prayer to Lord Sun called Adhithya Hrudaya. Rama chanted this prayer and got the ability to kill Ravana.

### **Agasthya cursed King Indra Dhyumna**

There was a very great king called Indra Dhyumna in the Pandya dynasty. This king was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Once when Agasthya came to visit him, the king was so drowned in his devotion to Lord Vishnu, that he did not see or show hospitality to Sage Agasthya. Sage Agasthya cursed to him to become an elephant for 1000 years. This elephant was called Gajendra. At this time another sage called Devala cursed a Gandarwa called Huhu to become a crocodile because he disturbed his penance. Once the Elephant got in to the river in which the crocodile was living. The crocodile caught hold of the feet of the elephant. After a very long time, the elephant called Lord Narayana, who came and killed the crocodile. He also removed the curse on Indra Dhyumna and gave him salvation.

### **Agasthya cursed Thataka**

Thataka was the daughter of a Yaksha called Sukethu. She was born to him because of the blessing of Lord Brahma. She had the strength of 1000 elephants. She married another Yaksha called Sunda and a son Mareecha was born to them. In a quarrel with Agasthya, Sunda was killed. Thataka and Mareecha became very angry and attacked the hermitage of Agasthya. Agasthya cursed them and they became Rakshasas. Later they were killed by Lord Rama and both of them attained salvation.

## **Agasthya turned a Vaishnavite temple to that of Shiva**

Agasthya when he arrived from the northern parts of India was a shaivite. He along with his wife reached a place called Kuttralam in Tamil Nadu. There was a temple for Lord Vishnu in Kuttralam. Agasthya being a shaivite was refused entry in to the temple. Agasthya by his miraculous powers converted the statue of Vishnu inside the temple to Shiva Lingam and demonstrated to the people that Shiva and Vishnu were the same one God.

# Devayani and Kacha

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Retold by P. R. Ramachander

Kacha was the eldest son of Brahaspathi, the son of Angeeras. He was an extremely handsome boy. His father was the Guru (teacher) of all devas. When he was a young lad, the fight between Devas and Asuras was continuing. Devas had a complaint that Shukra the Guru of Asuras was protecting the Asuras in a better way. Shukra had got the knowledge oh Maha Mruthyunjaya Mantram from Lord Shiva and he was using it to bring it to life all dead Asuras. The devas also wanted to learn that mantra. Kacha volunteered to help them.

He went and approached Shukra as a student. Shukra accepted him and started teaching him. Shukra had a very pretty daughter called Devayani. Devayani and Kacha being of the same age became very close friends. The Asuras were looking at this happening with lot of suspicion. They justifiably thought that Kacha's intention was not to simply gain knowledge but learn the Maha Mruthyunjaya Mantra from Sage Shukra. So when Kacha had gone to the forest to graze the cattle of Shukra's household, they killed Kacha and made a wolf eat him. When Kacha did not return, Devayani started crying. Since Shukra loved his daughter very much, he chanted the Maha Mruthyunjaya Mantra to bring back Kacha. Kacha came back to life in the stomach of the wolf, pierced it and came out. The Asuras were very unhappy at the turn of these events. So when next day, Kacha went to take bath in the river, they killed him, burnt him and mixed his ashes in the sea. Again the same thing happened. To please his darling child Devayani, Shukra brought back Kacha to life using his mantra. This infuriated the Asuras. So next time when they hold of Kacha, they killed him, burnt him and mixed the ashes with an alcoholic drink and gave it to their teacher Shukra. Shukra unknowingly drank the drink. This time when Shukra chanted the Maha Mruthyunjaya Mantra, he came to life in the stomach of Shukra. It became evident that if he comes out, Shukra will die. Then Shukra taught the Maha Mruthyunjaya mantra to Kacha who was within his stomach. Kacha came out of the stomach of Shukra and brought back his teacher to life by chanting the mantra. Once it was over, Kacha told his Guru that he wanted to go back. At this time Devayani requested Kacha to marry her, since she loved him. But Kacha told that since he came out of the stomach of Shukra, he was like a son to him and Devayani was like a sister. Devayani cursed Kacha that the mantra that he has learnt would not be effective, if he chanted it. Kacha also cursed Devayani that she would not get married to sons of any devas.

Kacha went back happily and taught the mantra he had learned to others. Later Devayani married a king called Yayati. Shukra, who got into trouble because of alcoholic drink, forbade, all Brahmins from drinking it.

# Devayani and Yayati

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Retold by P. R. Ramachander

Devayani was the daughter of Sage Shukra who was the guru of all Asuras and Oorjaswathi. She was cursed by Kacha (see Kacha-Devayani) that she would not marry another Deva. At that time the Asura king was Vrushaparva and Sage Shukra was also living in his palace. The king had a daughter called Sarmishta. Sarmishta and Devayani were very close friends. One day they went to the forest for playing along with several slaves. While they were bathing in the river Indra happened to see them and wanted to play a prank with them. He transformed himself to wind and swept away the cloths of Sarmishta and Devayani. Seeing this, both of them rushed out of the river and tried to get back their cloths. Sarmishta only got a dress of Devayani and was trying to wear it. Devayani caught hold of that dress and tried to pull it out. Sarmishta got very angry and shouted that Devayani's father was a vagabond and was living at the charity of her father. She and her slaves snatched the dress from Devayani's hand and pushed her in to a well and left for their homes. At that time a king called Yayati came to the forest for hunting. He felt thirsty and came near the well to drink some water. There he saw Devayani and rescued her. The king left to his kingdom but Devayani did not return home.

Shukra and his wife Oorjaswathi got very worried to see that Devayani has not returned. They send a friend of Devayani called Goornika to search and bring her back. Goornika easily found out Devayani but Devayani refused to come back to her father. She said she did not want to live with her father who was living in the charity of Vrushaparva. Goornika went and told about all this to Shukra and his wife. Both of them came to the forest to meet and take back, Devayani. Then Devayani told Shukra and about the happenings in the forest. Shukra became infuriated and informed Vrushaparva that he and his family are leaving his kingdom. Vrushaparva realizing fully well that Shukra was the power behind the Asuras, sought his pardon. Then Devayani told the king that if he sends 100 slaves to serve her including the princess Sarmishta, they would come back.

Sometime later Devayani met Yayati in a forest where he had come for hunting. She told him that ever since he saved her from the well, she had chosen him as her husband. But realizing that Sage Shukra was father of Devayani, Yayati told her that he was willing to marry her with the permission of her father. Devayani send word to her parents, who came to forest. They willingly gave in marriage Devayani to Yayati. While Devayani went to Yayati's kingdom, Sarmishta also accompanied her as her slave. Sage Shukra called his son in law and warned him not even to touch Sarmishta.

After some time a son was born to Yayati and Devayani and they named him as Yadu. It was at this time that Sarmishta met Yayati secretly and requested for a son by him. He was scared and refused. But using her wits she made the king Yayati for agreeing for her proposal and son called Druhyu was born to them. Devayani came to know about the birth of a child to Sarmishta but did not know that Yayati was the child's father. Years rolled by Devayani begot another child called Thurvasu and Sarmishta begot two sons called Anudruhyu and Pooru.

Once when Devayani and the king came to the palace garden, Sarmishta's three sons had also come there. Devayani could see striking similarity of the children of Sarmishta with King Yayati. She called them and asked them, the name of their father. They told without hesitation that it was king Yayati.

Angered very much, Devayani returned back to sage Shukra's and told him about all the happenings. Shukra got infuriated and cursed that Yayati should become an old man. By this time Yayati reached there and craved for his pardon. Shukra then told him that Yayati can exchange his old man status for 100 years, if any one willingly exchanges it for his youth. Yayati came back and called each of his sons and requested them to exchange their youth with him. Only Pooru agreed. Yayati then lived for 100 years as king. After him Pooru became the king.

# Ganapathi - Remover of Obstacles

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[Some Anecdotes]

Compiled by P. R. Ramachander

Ganapathi who is also referred to as Ganapathi, Ganesa (Chief of Shiva's army), Vigneswara (Lord who removes obstacles), Gaja Mukha (Elephant faced God), Eka Dantha (God with one tusk), Lambodhara (God with a big Paunch) etc., is one of the very important Gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is endearingly called Pillayar (our son) in Tamil Nadu.

He is the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi. He is considered as married to two wives, Sidhi (occult powers) and Budhi (wisdom), in the Northern part of India and considered as a chronic bachelor in South India. There are some temples in South India like Chidambaram where he is shown along with his two wives. He is considered as the elder son of Shiva and Parvathi in South India and is considered as younger son in North India.

He has a very peculiar appearance, with his elephant head, an extraordinarily big paunch, over which he ties a snake, a broken trunk and with his steed being a very small insignificant mouse.

Throughout India, he is worshipped before venturing to do any new job, including poojas, fire sacrifices, celebrations and even day to activities so that he would help us to complete the job undertaken successfully. He is also considered as the God of Knowledge and learning in many places of India. Coconut and Modakas are very dear to him.

## **Ganapathi's Origin**

There are many stories regarding his birth. The most popular one is as follows:

One day when Lord Shiva was away, Goddess Parvathi wanted to take bath in the river. To guard against any unwelcome intrusion, she took a little turmeric paste from her body and created a young boy. She gave him clear instructions not to allow any body inside. Unfortunately at this time Lord Shiva returned. The new boy refused him admission, though lord Shiva told him that he is the husband of Parvathi. Lord Shiva became very angry and cut off the head of this new boy and threw it away using his trident. At this time, Goddess Parvathi came back and became very sad, that the boy created by her was killed. Lord Shiva wanted to console Parvathi. So he sent his army to bring the first head that they see on their way. The first head that they saw was the head of dying elephant. Shiva fixed that head on the boy's trunk

and brought him back to life. He also adopted him as his elder son and made him chief of his army.

There are many other stories on how Ganapathi was born. The one in Uthara Ramayana says that once Shiva and Parvathi took the form of elephant and were wandering in the forest. A son was born to them and that is Ganapathi.

Yet another story tells that Goddess Parvathi wanted a son badly and did Tapas to Lord Vishnu. He blessed her and a son was born to her. Goddess Parvathi invited all Gods to come and see her baby. When Lord Sani (Planet Saturn) came and had a look at the baby, the baby's head was burnt. Lord Vishnu traveled throughout the world and brought back a head of an elephant which was fixed to the baby. All Gods present there blessed the baby, that unless he is worshipped first, they would not accept any worship.

Yet another story is that of Gajamukhasura. Gajamukhasura did great penance toward Lord Shiva. When he came before, he requested Lord Shiva to live in his belly. When Lord Shiva did not return, Goddess Parvathi sought the help of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu dressed himself as a flutist and took along with him Nandi, the steed of Lord Shiva, Nandi was made to dance funny dances, in front of Gajamukhasura to the soulful music provided by Lord Vishnu (This type of bull dancing to the tune of music is still prevalent in South India). Gajamukhasura was pleased and gave a boon to Lord Vishnu, without knowing him who he is. Lord Vishnu requested him to release Lord Shiva. When Lord Shiva came out of his belly the asura died. While dying he requested Lord Shiva, that his head should be remembered after he is dead. After his death, Lord Shiva fixed the asura's head on his elder son.

Another story tells that Shiva in a fit of rage killed Adithya, the son of sage Kashyapa. When Kashyapa became very angry, Lord Shiva replaced the head of Kashyapa's son by the head of Indra's elephant. The sage was infuriated and cursed that Lord Shiva's son also will undergo the same fate as his own son.

Still another tale states that on one occasion, Parvati's used bath-water was thrown into the Ganges, and this water was drunk by the elephant-headed Goddess Malini, who gave birth to a baby with four arms and five elephant heads. The river goddess Ganga claimed him as her son, but Shiva declared him to be Parvati's son, reduced his five heads to one and enthroned him as the controller of obstacles (Vignesh).

## **Ganapathi lost his one tusk**

The most popular story as to how Ganapathi lost his tusk is as follows. Veda Vyasa decided to compose the huge epic Mahabharata. He needed somebody to write down his composition, as soon as he composes it. Ganapathi, being the God of knowledge, was requested to do this job. Ganapathi agreed on one condition. Veda Vyasa should dictate all he wants to write at one stretch and without break. Vyasa agreed but he put a condition that Lord Ganapathi should write a verse only after understanding it. After agreeing to this Ganapathi broke one of his tusks and used it as a pen. Veda Vyasa composed extremely difficult to understand verses, whenever he wanted time to think. This was the reason why Ganapathi become the one tusked God.

Padma Purana ascribes a completely different reason for this. It seems once Lord Parasurama went to Kailasa to see Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva was at that time asleep. Lord Ganapathi, who was guarding the room of Lord Shiva, did not allow Parasurama inside. A war ensued between Ganapathi and Parasurama and in this war Ganapathi lost one of his tusks because of the axe of Parasurama which had been gifted to him by Lord Shiva.

There is yet another story connecting moon to the loss of one tusk of Ganapathi. This is as follows. Once on a Vinayaka Chaturthi, Ganapathi got very large offering of very tempting Modhaks. He ate all that was offered and being unable to walk with a heavy belly, mounted on his steed, the mouse. Suddenly a snake appeared from the forest. The mouse on whom, Ganapathi was riding was terrified at the sight of a snake and started running away. Naturally Ganapathi fell from his steed and his belly broke slightly. Not losing his presence of mind Ganapathi caught hold of the snake and tied his belly tightly. Chandra, who was seeing all this laughed at Ganapathi. The short tempered Ganapathi became very angry, broke one of his tusks and threw it at the moon. The Moon broke in to pieces. Ganapathi also cursed the moon, that, he would become a dark globe within 15 days, daily losing one crescent and whosoever sees him on a chaturthi day (Fourth day of the waning moon) would be laughed at. Later Lord Shiva brokered a peace between Ganapathi and the moon. He said Moon will get reduced to dark as per Ganapathi's curse and later regain his brilliance in another 15 days. (Some people ascribe the moon's downfall due to a curse by Daksha, when he saw that out of his 27 daughters married to moon, he was showing partiality to only one girl Rohini).

## **Ganapathi made a speedier round of the world**

Once sage Narada offered a very celestial mango fruit to Lord Shiva. Both his children Ganapathi and Subrahmanya wanted that fruit. Narada suggested that the one who travels all round the world first should get this fruit. Both Ganapathi and Subrahmanya agreed. Immediately Lord Subrahmanya started for his journey on his steed the peacock. Ganapathi who is very heavy and rides on a slow mouse circled round Lord Shiva and Parvathi and said that he has gone round the world because the entire world was within Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi. Lord Shiva was pleased with this explanation and gave the mango to Ganapathi

Another story says that there was a need for Shiva to appoint a commander and the above competition was held and Ganapathi won the post as explained in the last paragraph and was nominated as Ganesa or Ganapathi (Both meaning the Lord of Shiva's army) and later Lord Subrahmanya was appointed as the captain of the army of devas.

Another story says that when Ganapathi and Subrahmanya reached marriageable age, Shiva held the above competition and Ganapathi won it as described and his marriage with Sidhi and Budhi was celebrated first.

## **Ganapathi blessed the South India with a great river**

The marriage of Shiva and Parvathi was to be celebrated on mount Kailasa. All the people all over the world started traveling towards mount Kailasa. Due to the heavy burden on the northern side, the world started tilting towards the north. To correct this Lord Shiva requested sage Agasthya to go and live in the South of India. Agasthya obeyed the orders of Lord Shiva and reached the south. The entire south India was extremely dry at that time. Lord Shiva had sent some sacred waters of Ganga along with Agasthya, which Sage Agasthya was preserving very carefully in his pot. One day when he was asleep, Ganapathi took the form of a crow and toppled Agasthya's pot. From the Ganga started spreading in to a river. This river was called kaveri - She who was spread by a crow.

Another story says that it was not Ganges which was in Agasthya's pot but his wife Lopa Mudhra who was in love with South India.

## **Ganapathi prevented Ravana becoming powerful**

Once Ravana by his musical skill pleased Lord Shiva, Blessing him Lord Shiva gave a Shiva Linga (Athma Linga) and asked Ravana to take it Sri Lanka and preserve it there. He told Ravana that if that Shiva Linga reaches Sri Lanka, nobody can win over Ravana. But he also told that he should

never keep that Shiva Linga down on earth at any other spot while on his way. When Ravana reached Gokarna (A place in Karnataka) he wanted very badly to answer nature's call, Ganapathi appeared there as Brahmin boy and agreed to hold the Shiva Linga for some time. He also told Ravana that if he does not come back by the stipulated time, he would keep the Shiva Linga there and go away. Lord Ganapathi delayed the coming back of Ravana and kept the Shiva Linga there and vanished. That place is called Gokarna. This effectively prevented Ravana to be ever victorious.

### **Ganapathi helped his brother marry Valli**

Subramanya first married the Devasena the daughter of Indra. Subrahmanya Later during his travels in south fell in love with Valli who was a tribal princess. Though Valli loved Lord Subrahmanya she was scared of him, her being a simple tribal girl and he being the celestial God. One day while Valli was walking in the forest, Lord Ganapathi took the form of an elephant and chased Valli. Subrahmanya in the form of an old man gave her protection and requested the elephant to go away. Then Lord Subrahmanya showed his real form and both of them got married.

### **Ganapathi and Kubhera**

Kubhera was the God of wealth and was very proud of his wealth. He had slight contempt towards Shiva for living in such poor conditions on the top of the mountain. One day he invited Lord Shiva for a feast in his capital Alakapuri and also told that he has arranged for so much food that nobody can eat it completely Lord Shiva said that he was very busy and sent his son Ganapathi instead. Ganapathi not only ate all the food that was prepared but also everything in sight in Kubhera's town. Kubhera understood his folly and requested for forgiveness.

# Garuda

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[Some Anecdotes]

Retold by P. R. Ramachander

Kasyapa the grandson of Lord Brahma married Adithi, Dithi, Dhanu, Kalika, Thamra, Krodhavasa, Manu and Anala, who were all the daughters of Daksha. Of them Thamra got five daughters viz Krounchi, Dasi syeni, Dhrutharashtri and Shuki. The children of Krounchi were owls. Dasi became the mother of Dasa (Slaves). Syeni gave birth to eagle and vulture, Dhrutharashtri became the mother of Swan and Nightingale. Shuki gave birth to daughter called Natha and her daughter was Vinatha. Kadru was the daughter of Kroda vasa. (There is a different version saying that Kadru and Vinatha were sisters who married sage Kashyapa.)

Once Vinatha and Kadru, were serving Sage Kashyapa who was doing Thapas. When he woke up from meditation, he told them that he was pleased with them and willing to give them one boon each. Kadru requested for 1000 sons. Vinatha requested for two sons who would be more valorous than Kadru's children. He gave them the boon as requested. After some time Kadru laid 1000 eggs and Vinatha two eggs. Both of them preserved these eggs in warm pots. After 500 years Kadru's eggs broke and from them came 1000 snakes. But nothing happened to the two eggs laid by Vinatha. So she took one egg and broke it open. Inside the egg was a half formed Aruna. Aruna became very angry with his mother and cursed her, "Due to your impatience you have made me suffer. So you would become a slave to Kadru. But a great son will come out of the other egg and he would rescue you from this slavery." He then went away to Sun God and became his charioteer. Since he was of purple colour, the dawn when he comes out is of purple hue.

Another 500 years passed by and from the other egg came out Garuda. His body was shining like fire. The fire God found that his luster was less than that of Garuda and approached the devas. The devas then approached Garuda and requested him to reduce his luster and he agreed. They all gave him several boons. Garuda returned to his mother.

Uchaisravas was a white horse born out of the churning of the ocean of milk by Devas and Asuras. He became the steed of King Indra. Once Kadru told Vinatha that the tail of this horse was black, Vinatha differed and told Kadru, that if indeed the tail is black she will become the slave of Kadru. The snake sons of Kadru simply attached themselves on the tail of this horse, when Vinatha saw the horse and the tail appeared black to her. Because of this she was forced to become the slave of Kadru. So Garuda also had to become the slave of Kadru and her snake sons. Once the snakes, ordered Garuda to

carry them to the pretty island of Ramaneeeyaka (heart melting pretty). Garuda flew to the island but rose so high in the sky that many of the snakes got burnt due to Sun's rays. However when Kadru requested the Sun, he sent a cooling rain and the snakes recovered.

Once Garuda asked them as to what he should do so that he and his mother got their freedom tired of being a slave to Kadru. They told him that if he can go to heaven and bring nectar (amrutha) for them, then they will free both of them. Garuda informed about his determination to bring nectar, to his mother Vinatha. He was worried about his food during the long journey to heaven. Then Vinatha told him about an island called Nishadalaya (Abode of darkness). She told that he can visit the island and eat as many Nishads as he wants. She also told him that there were a few Brahmins in the island and he should under no circumstances eat them. Garuda then asked his mother as to how to recognize Brahmins. She told him that if he tries to swallow Brahmins, they will be as hot as fire. Then Vinatha blessed her son and said that his wings will be protected by wind god, back by the Sun and the moon, head by fire and body by the eight Vasus.

Garuda reached Nishadalaya and started eating thousands of people there. By mistake he happened to try to swallow a Brahmin and his wife. Since they were as hot as fire, he spit them out. They both blessed him. Then Garuda went to the place where Sage Kasyapa was doing Thapas (meditation). The sage blessed him. Garuda told him that he was very hungry. Sage Kasyapa told him to eat a tortoise and an elephant which were spoiling the waters of the lake of that island. They both were brothers called Vibhavasus and Supreethika. They quarreled for share of their father's wealth. Supreethika cursed that Vibhavasus should become a tortoise and he in turn cursed him to become an elephant. Garuda got hold of both of them, killed them and started flying with them for a proper place to eat both of them. After a long search, he located a very big Banyan tree. He sat on the tree and started eating his prey. The branch on which he was sitting broke. Then Garuda realized that sages called Bala Khilyas were doing Thapas on the branches of that tree, by hanging upside down. Then Garuda started flying with a branch so that he can keep in a place so that the sages will not be harmed. He reached the Gandhamadhana Mountains and informed Sage Kashyapa about his problem. Kashyapa requested for pardon from the sages for the unknowing deed of his son Garuda. The sages did not get angry and blessed Garuda and went to Himalayas. Garuda then ate his prey of the elephant and tortoise and continued his journey to heaven. Later he put the great branch of banyan tree in the sea. From the place he deposited the branch, a land mass came up and this is the present day Sri Lanka.

Even before Garuda came to Deva loka, there were very bad omens there. Brahaspathi told the devas that it is due to the fact that Garuda is coming to take away their hard earned nectar. Indra and devas decided that they will guard the pot containing Amrutha (nectar), come what may.

Garuda neared the pot of Amrutha. First he was opposed by Viswa Karma. Garuda defeated him very easily. Due to the flapping of the wings of Garuda, lot of dust rose from all sides and the Devas were having very poor visibility. Later Devas, Indra, moon and the Sun fought with Garuda and they were all defeated. Then Garuda entered the place where the pot of Amrutha was kept. Round the pot two huge Chakra (wheels) were rotating. All round the chakras, one very dangerous Yantra (machine) was also installed. Below the Chakras several snakes were raising poisonous fumes. The snakes never closed their eyes. Garuda threw dust on the eyes of the snakes and cut them in to two pieces. He took a micro form and entered near the pot. He also destroyed the Yantra and Chakras. Then Garuda took the pot of Amrutha and rose on the sky. Lord Vishnu who was watching this valorous deed, became pleased with Garuda and offered him a boon. Garuda requested him to make him as his steed and also he should become an amara (one without death) even without taking Amrutha. Lord Vishnu granted him, both these boons.

At this time Indra opposed him and sent his Vajrayudha against him. This great weapon could only remove one of his feathers. Indra then asked for Garuda's pardon and requested him to return the pot of Amrutha. Garuda agreed to this provided Indra permitted him to eat snakes as his food. Indra granted this boon. Then Garuda told Indra, "I am not taking this pot for myself but to my cousins, because they have made me and my mother their slaves. I would give the pot of Amrutha to them and I do not have any objection if you take it back from them."

Indra agreed and followed Garuda. Garuda took the pot of Amrutha and gave it to the Nagas and Kadru. He told them that this pot should be kept on a bed of Durba grass and they should eat it only after they have taken their bath. The Nagas agreed. When Nagas went to take their bath, Indra stole the pot of Amrutha and took it back. The Nagas which came back, felt sad at the loss of Amrutha and licked the Durba grass, where some drops had spilled. This sharp grass cut their tongues in the middle. From then on all snakes have a tongue cut in the middle and are called Dwijihwas (Two lounded ones). Garuda and his mother were freed.

There is also a story that Indra was humbled by Garuda because of a curse by the Balakhilya sages.

Once, Sage Kasyapa was doing a great fire sacrifice to get a very great son. He requested Indra and the 60000 BalaKhilyas who were very tiny to bring fire wood for his fire sacrifice. Indra collected the necessary fire wood in a very short time and the Balakhilya saints were trying to lift very small pieces of wood, even by that time. Naturally Indra made fun of the saints. BalaKhilyas left the place and started another fire sacrifice to humble Indra. Indra rushed to sage Kashyapa and requested to him to get pardon from the BalaKhilya stages. Kashyapa approached them. Then they transferred the effect of fire sacrifice they were doing and blessed him to get a son who will humble Indra. Garuda was born as a result of this fire sacrifice.

## **Garuda and Kaliya**

Due to his being permitted to eat snakes for food by Indra and also due to his great enmity with them, Garuda started eating snakes (naga) en masse. The snakes who were not able to oppose him, told him that they would send one big snake as food for him every day. Though all the snakes agreed with this arrangement, a snake called Kaliya did not agree. There was a big war between Garuda and Kaliya. This war was fought over the present day Yamuna river. While fighting, due to the movement of feathers of Garuda, water rose very high and fell on a sage called Soubhari. This sage cursed Garuda saying that if he comes to that area his head will break in to thousand pieces. Because of this Garuda was not able to go near that spot of Yamuna and the snake Kaliya lived there with his family.

## **Garuda and the King Sagara**

There was a king called Subahu in the Sun dynasty. He had a queen called Yadavi. For a long time after marriage she did not conceive. After prayers by Subahu and Yadavi she conceived. The other wives of Subahu did not like this development. They gave her a poison through deceit. Yadavi did not give birth to a child for seven years and carried her pregnancy. At this time Subahu decided to leave the kingdom and become a disciple of a sage called Ourva. Yadavi also accompanied him. Suddenly Subahu died. Yadavi also wanted to die in his funeral pyre. Sage Ourva told her that she was carrying a child and that child would become one of the great kings of the world. Then she desisted from death and in due course gave birth to a son called Sagara. During this time Vinatha who had lost her way in the forest, reached the hermitage of Ourva. When he came to know that she was living as a slave to Kadru, he blessed her and told her that a son called Garuda would be born to her and he will free her from slavery. At that time Vinatha had a daughter called Sumathi. Her hand was requested by a sage called Upamanyu, to save his ancestors. But Sumathi refused to marry him. He cursed her saying that, she would not get a Brahmin as her groom. Because of this Vinatha was terribly worried and send Garuda to the hermitage of Ourva. When Garuda

explained the problem, the sage suggested Garuda to give his elder sister in marriage to Sagara. Sagara later became a very great king and begot 60 thousand sons out of Sumathi.

### **Garuda was Humbled**

Mathali the charioteer of Indra had a very pretty daughter called Guna Kesi. He went on searching for a suitable groom for his pretty daughter. He took the help of Sage Narada in this search and reached Patala. There they located the Very eligible Sumukha who was a Naga (serpent) Lord. But Chikura the father of Sumukha had just then been eaten by Garuda. At that time Garuda has told Sumukha that he would eat him in another month. Then Mathali and Narada approached Indra to find a solution to this problem. At that time Lord Vishnu also happened to be in Indra's court. Indra blessed Sumukha with long life and as a result he married Guna Kesi. When he heard about this Garuda was terribly upset and flew to the court of Indra and threatened him. Lord Vishnu, then extended his right hand to stop Garuda and asked him whether he can lift it. As soon as Lord Vishnu's hand was kept on Garuda's head, he felt as if the entire universe was kept on his head and felt miserable. Garuda requested the pardon from Lord Vishnu.

### **Garuda and Galava**

Once the God of death took the form of sage Vasishta and went to the hermitage of sage Viswamithra. He requested for food. But since the food prepared was over, Sage Viswamithra himself prepared rice. By this time the God of death left the place saying he will come in a minute. Sage Viswamithra brought a plate full of hot rice and was waiting for the God of death. Since he did not come, he had to wait for one hundred years. God of death came at that time and took the food. Galava was the disciple of Viswamithra who was with him and who looked after him during that hundred years.

Viswamithra blessed him. After his education was completed, it was time for Galava to go away. At that time he asked his teacher, what he can give him as fees. Viswamithra refused to accept anything from such a good student. But when Galava went on insisting, he requested him to bring him 800 white horses with black ears. Galava did not have money to purchase the horses. When he was upset, Garuda came near him and offered his help. He flew with Galava on his back to the eastern side. After lot of time they reached the Rishbha Mountain. There a Brahmin lady called Sandali was doing penance. She prepared food and gave them. While taking food Garuda insulted Sandali. After food both of them slept. When he woke up Garuda found that all his feathers have fallen away from him Garuda begged the pardon of Sandali. She excused him and blessed him. His feathers grew on him again.

Then they traveled again and reached the palace of King Yayati. Yayati did not have sufficient money. But he gave his daughter Madhavi to Galava. Galava was able to obtain only 600 horses by giving Madhavi in turn to three kings, He then gave Viswamithra the 600 horses as well as Madhavi instead of the remaining 200 horses. Viswamithra had a son called Ashtaka from Madhavi.

Also according to the Mahabharata, Garuda had six sons from whom were descended the race of birds. The members of this race were of great might and without compassion, subsisting as they did on their relatives the snakes. Vishnu was their protector.

# Krishna - Nitya Brahmachari

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Retold by P. R. Ramachander

One day Lord Krishna was playing with his queen Rukmani in the banks of Yamuna. Suddenly the Lord told her, "Rukmani, on the other shore of Yamuna, sage Durwasa has come and he is very hungry. Please prepare good food and take it to the sage".

Rukmani immediately prepared a sumptuous food and packed it and came back to the shores of Yamuna. Then she told her lord, "Lord, The Yamuna is in floods and there is no boat or boatman in sight. How can poor me, cross this mighty river?"

Lord Krishna replied, "Dear Rukmani that should not be any problem. Approach the river and tell the river that the Nitya Brahmachari (perennial bachelor) has asked her to give way to you. She will surely give you way".

Rukmani was surprised and asked her Lord, "Lord, who is this Nitya Brahmachari and why am I not able to see him?"

The Lord replied, "Of course, Rukmani, it is myself".

Rukmani was surprised. She could not understand how her husband who has seven other wives could call himself, Nitya Brahmachari. Anyway she decided to obey him. She went near Yamuna and told the river, "River Yamuna, my husband, the Nitya Brahmachari has asked you to give way to me, so that I can reach the other shore".

The river immediately obliged. Rukmani crossed the Yamuna, met sage Durwasa, saluted him and served him the sumptuous food that she has brought with her. The Sage liked the food and became very happy and blessed her.

Then Rukmani told him, "Sir, I am very gratified by the blessing of the sage like you. Now I have to cross back the river Yamuna and join my husband. Can you please help me do it?"

Sage Durwasa replied, "Of course Rukmani, It is my pleasure and duty. Go to river Yamuna and tell her that Nitya Upavasi (who never takes food) has asked her to give way to you. She will help you".

Rukmani was taken aback. She thought how this sage who has just had a sumptuous feast can call himself Nitya Upavasi. She did not bother to ask him, because he was well known for his short temper. She went near the river and told her, "River Yamuna, now I have to cross you and reach the other shore. The Nitya Upavasi has asked you to give way to me".

The river obliged and Rukmani crossed the river and joined her husband. Her face showed that she was terribly confused. She approached her lord and told him, "Lord, as per your direction I served good food and crossed back the river. I told her to give way as per the wishes of Nitya Upavasi. Strangely she did it".

Lord Krishna laughingly replied, "I know Rukmani that you are terribly confused to see me calling myself as Nitya Brahmachari and the sage calling himself as Nitya Upavasi. We both were telling only the truth. This is because we both are realized souls and do not attach ourselves to this ethereal body of ours. We both know that we are really the souls within this body. That soul does not marry and does not take food and that is how I (my soul) am a Brahmachari and Sage Durwasa (his soul) is an Upavasi. Once you understand this simple truth, you can lead a very contented and happy life".

# Maandatha - King Born to a Man

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Retold by P. R. Ramachander

Maandatha was a very valorous king of the Ikshuvaku clan. His father Yuvanaswa married one hundred queens and could not beget a child. He was terribly depressed by this and was wandering from forest to forest in search of holy men. At last he reached a forest where a group of divine sages resided. Seeing him highly depressed, the sages sought the reason for his sorrow. Then he told them that he did not have children. The sages took great pity on the king and decided to perform the Pooja called Indra Daivatha. They filled a pot with water and were making it holy by chanting of several sets of prayers. This continued for several days. One night after the Pooja, the saints were sleeping. At that time Yuvanaswa got very thirsty and could not find water anywhere. So he entered the Yaga sala and drank all the water from the pot which contained the holy water. Next day the saints found out what has happened. Then they told the king that this water was supposed to be taken by his queens to get a baby. Since he has taken it, he will have a baby. The apprehensive king became pregnant.

After ten months, the child was taken out of the right part of his stomach by cutting it open. The ministers and other learned men advised the king to abandon this unnatural baby in the forest. In the forest, left alone the baby became hungry and started crying. The devas and Indra took pity on the baby and told the baby "Maam Datha" (Eat myself) and made it suck the thumb of its right leg. Milk was produced from this thumb and the baby grew extremely wise and very strong. He was called Maandatha, because of what Indra told him.

After Yuvanaswa, Maandatha became the king. Due to his wisdom and valour, he made his country great. He married a virtuous lady called Bindumathi. Two sons called Puruguthsa and Muchukunda were born to him. These two sons became very great and noble kings later.

Once there was famine in Maandatha's country because of the failure of rain for three years. When Maandatha consulted the sages, they told him, "This is Krutha Yuga and during this period only Brahmins are supposed to do penance. But in your country one sage who is not a Brahmin is doing penance. If you find him out and kill him, then everything would be set right." Maandatha was horrified at the idea and refused to follow their advice. Then as an alternative, they advised him and all his countrymen to observe the penance of Ekadasi along with people from all castes. There was a torrential rain and the country's problem was solved.

# Maya [Illusion]

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Retold by P. R. Ramachander

Maya (illusion) Devi was one of the wives of Lord Vishnu. She has been given a very great role in the Hindu philosophy.

## Genealogy as given in Agni Purana

Himsa (violence) married Adharma (foul deeds). They had two children Anrutham (lack of action) and Nikruthi (dishonesty). These two children in turn produced four children viz. Bhayam (fear), Narakam (hell), Maya (illusion) and Vedana (pain). Maya begot Mruthyu (death) and Vedana begot Dukha (sorrow). Mruthyu produced four children Vyadhi(disease), Jara (old age), Soka (sorrow), Trushna (attraction) and Krodha (anger). There are two stories about Maya in Puranas.

### 1. Story of Gaadhi the Brahmin

In the Kosala country there was a Brahmin called Gaadhi. He went to the forest and standing in neck deep water started tapas towards Vishnu. After eight months Lord Vishnu appeared before him. Lord Vishnu asked him about the boon that he wanted. Gaadhi replied that the only thing he wanted was to see Goddess Maya Devi. Lord agreed and told him that he would see her eventually and went back to Vaikunta.

Years passed but nothing happened to Gaadhi. Once he entered a lake to take bath. Suddenly he forgot everything. There was a sudden change in his mind. He saw himself lying as a corpse in his own house. He saw that his relatives were sad and his wife was crying holding his leg. He saw that he was taken to the fearful cremation ground and also saw himself cremated. Then he saw that his soul going away and enter the womb of a Chandala woman. He saw then that he was born as an extremely black boy. He saw that boy (himself) grew up into a young man. He saw that he married a very pretty lady. He saw that he entered into love play with his wife in various places like garden, bed room, in a hut and so on. He also saw that he begot some bad sons. He saw his grandsons growing up and himself becoming extremely old. He saw that suddenly his wife and all his sons dying before his own eyes. Then he saw himself leaving his native place and wandering without any aim. Then he saw himself reaching a great town where an elephant was waiting with a garland. He saw the elephant putting the garland around his neck. He saw the people of the town making him, the king of the country. He saw that all the wives of the previous king becoming his wives. He saw him ruling the country well and taking the name Galava. He saw

himself ruling that country for eight years. He saw that one day he went out of his palace in ordinary cloths. He saw him going to a slum, where all people recognized him as Pulkasa - a lowly slave. He then saw that because of this the queens and ministers of the country, insulting him and driving him away from the palace.

He was weeping and crying over his fate. He then created a big fire and jumped in to it. Suddenly at this time, he woke up from his reverie and saw himself standing in the lake. He went back to his home. A few days later a very lean Brahmin, who had burns all over his body visited him. When Gaadhi asked him, about the burns, his guest repeated the story that happened to him in his reverie. Surprised at his narration, Gaadhi realized that all that happened to him was due to his contact with Maya Devi. He left his home, went to the forest and again did Tapas to Lord Vishnu. This time he requested for his salvation.

## **2. Sage Narada and Maya Devi**

Once Lord Vishnu told Sage Narada that , there is nothing real in this world and what all we see is due to the playful acts of Maya Devi. Narada did not understand it and requested Lord Vishnu to make him experience the powers of Maya Devi. Vishnu took sage Narada along with him and they reached a very deep forest in which there was a very big lake. Lord Vishnu requested Sage Narada to take bath in that lake. Narada kept his Veena called Mahathi and the deer skin on which he used to meditate on the shore and entered the lake to take bath. Suddenly Sage Narada was transformed in to a very pretty lady. She came out of the lake and was enjoying the beauty of nature around her. At that time a king called Thaladwaja reached near the shore. Attracted by her divine beauty he requested the lady to marry him. She also agreed and married him. Times rolled by.

After 12 years of very happy married life they got a son called Veravarma. Then onwards, every two years she produced a child. And within another 24 years, she became mother of 12 children. Later she became mother for another eight children. All her children reached adulthood and married. And she got several grandchildren. At this time an enemy king invaded the country of Thaladwaja. In the battle most of his children and grandchildren were killed. Thaladwaja ran for his life. Then he left his country along with his wife and reached the same lake where he found her. Lord Vishnu in the form of a Brahmin was waiting there. He asked them to take bath in the lake. Narada regained his original form. He then could realize what all happened to him. Lord Vishnu then told him that all that happened was an illusion, which appeared real and was due to Maya Devi.

# Parvathi

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Retold by P. R. Ramachander

Goddess Parvathi is the consort of Lord Shiva. She is called like that because she is the daughter of Mountain (Parvatha). She is also known as Uma, Kathyayani, Gauri, Kali, Haimavathi, Easwari, Shivaa, Bhavani, Rudhrani, Sarvani, Sarvamangala, Aparna, Durga, Mrudani, Chandika, Ambika, Aarya, Dakshayani, Girija, Chamunda, Bhairavi. Meenakshi, etc. Most of these names indicate the various facets and moods of the goddess. Some of them are names which she assumed in different births. The stories of her origin and some of her births are given below:

## Sathi

Sathi was Lord Daksha's daughter. There is a story about her birth. There were a group of very powerful asuras called Halahalas. They did thapas towards Lord Brahma and got many boons. Later, they conquered all the three worlds and banned people from offering prayer to Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva waged a war on Halahalas and the battle went on for 60,000 years. As a result both, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva became very tired and morose.

Realizing the state of affairs, Lord Brahma requested his son Sanaka and other Prajapathis including Daksha to do Thapas to please Mahamaya (great enchantress) and help to give fresh enthusiasm to Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. That thapas went on for one lakh years. At last the Goddess came before them with four hands and three eyes. She assured Daksha that she will be born as a daughter to him. She was born to Daksha who named her as Sathi. Sathi was given in marriage to Lord Shiva and both Lord Shiva and Sathi continued to live in Daksha's house.

During this time Sage Durvasa, went to Jaambunadha and did thapas to please Jagadambika (Mother of the universe). She came before him and gave him a garland which she was wearing. That garland was presented by Sage Durvasa to Daksha. Daksha hung that garland in his bedroom. Attracted by the remarkable fragrance oozing out of the garland, he made love to his wife and that very sacred garland became tainted. Because of this sin he has committed, Daksha became infuriated with his daughter and son-in-law and drove them out of his house.

Later he performed a great Yaga (fire sacrifice), for which he did not invite his daughter and son in law. Sathi, in spite of her husband's opposition attended the Yaga and was insulted. Unable to bear this, she jumped in the Fire and died.

## **Kali**

At this time sage Kasyapa, got an asura son called Vajranga, through his wife Dithi. Vajranga was a very pious individual and did Thapas for 1000 years to please Lord Brahma. Later when he woke up from the Samadhi, he saw his wife Varangi crying by his side. She informed him that Devendra troubled her a lot, when Vajraanga was doing Thapas. This infuriated Vajraanga and he again did Thapas. When Lord Brahma appeared, he requested him to bless him with a son who will defeat Devendra. A son was born to him in due course. He was named as Tharaka. Tharaka started doing Thapas at a very young age in the middle of five fires in summer and inside water during winter. When Brahma appeared before him, he wanted a boon, that only a seven day old child should be able to kill him.

Along with Asuras called Kalanemi, Prasena and Jamba, Tharaka conquered all the three worlds. He troubled good people and encouraged bad people. When Devas approached Lord Brahma, he told them, that if a seven day child can become capable of killing this asura, it should only be born to Lord Shiva. He also told them that Sati would be born as a daughter to Himalaya Mountain and his queen Mena. She would marry Lord Shiva and their son would kill Tharaka. At this time Lord Shiva was wandering all over the world (some references say doing thapas).

Himalaya and Mena had three daughters and one son. The three daughters were Ragini, Kutila and Kali and a son called Mainaka. Kali was jet black in colour and did great thapas, so that she can marry Lord Shiva. Her sisters also had the same wish and they also did thapas. The devas asked the God of love to shoot an arrow on Shiva so that he starts considering of a marriage (The common version is that he should be woken up from his thapas).

The devas took first Ragini to Lord Brahma and asked him whether, she would be able to bear the child capable of killing Tharaka. Lord Brahma told them that she would not be. Ragini got very angry and misbehaved with Lord Brahma. He cursed her to become Sandhya (dusk). Devas later took Kutila to Lord Brahma. Brahma did not feel that she is suitable. When she misbehaved with Brahma she was cursed to become a river. Mena who had lost two daughters requested Kali to come back to her home after stopping the Thapas. She replied "Uu maa" (meaning-no mother). This became one of her names. She was also called Parvathi because she was the daughter of the mountain.

Later Kali came back to the house of Mena. But she later again, left her home and again started thapas. She was only a very young girl and was accompanied by two of her friends. This Thapas continued for several thousand years. At this time Lord Shiva visited the house of Himalaya and Mena. Hearing that they have a daughter who wanted to marry him, he visited Kali's hermitage. But when Kali recognized him as Lord Shiva, he vanished from there.

Kali intensified her Thapas. One day a young Brahmin boy visited her hermitage. When Kali told him that she was doing Thapas with an intention of marrying Shiva he told her that seemed to be foolish. "You are a princess brought up well. Shiva lives in the Cremation Ghat, dressed in elephant skin, travels on a mere bull and ties a snake around his neck." Kali got very angry with him and tried to drive him away. The boy was really Lord Shiva. He showed her his real form and both of them got married.

### **Kali becomes Gauri**

Shiva and Kali lead an extremely happy life. Shiva preferred to call her "Kali". But one day he called her "Kali, Kali". She felt he was jeering at her, for her black colour. She told him, "If you shoot an arrow against somebody, there would be an wound but over time, the wound would heal. If you cut a tree with an axe, the tree would again recover but if you shoot a person with harsh words, the wilting would be final. My black colour is not due to my mistake. Since you do not like it, I am going away from you."

She went to a deep forest and created four maid servants called Somaprabha, Jaya, Vijaya and Jayanthi to look after her and started Thapas again. Brahma appeared before her. When she wanted, colour change of her body, he told her "Oh Kali, the black colour will peel off from your body and you would assume white colour and people would start calling you Gauri." As told by him the black skin got peeled off and she became extremely white and she went back to Join Lord Shiva.

### **Parvathi and Mahishasura**

There were two asuras called Ramba and Kuramba. Both of them did not have children and did great Thapas. Kuramba did Thapas in the middle of water and he was swallowed by Indra, who took the form of a crocodile and swallowed him. Ramba did thapas in the middle of fire. When the god was not appearing before him, he started to cut parts of his body and putting them in fire. Agni, the God of fire came before him and blessed that he will have a very strong son in the first girl whom he is passionate about. On the way he saw a pretty buffalo and fell in love with it. As a result was born Mahishasura. When this was going on another He-buffalo fell in love with Mahisha's mother

and in the fight that buffalo killed Ramba. Mahisha and his mother requested a Yaksha to protect them. The yakshas helped them to cremate the body of Ramba and the she buffalo jumped in the funeral pyre of Ramba and died.

From the funeral pyre raised a very strong asura called Raktha Bheeja. He became a close friend and minister of Mahishasura. Two more asuras called Chanda and Munda, also joined them and became ministers and helpers of Mahishasura. Mahishasura and his three friends attacked Devas and troubled them. Devas along with Lord Brahma approached Lord Vishnu and then Lord Shiva. Lord Vishnu and Shiva and others got extremely angry at Mahishasura. The anger from all of them separated and joined together in to a glittering ball of fire and from that fire rose and joined at the top of Vindhya Mountain and reached the hermitage of Sage Kathyayana.

From that great sage raised his power and that also joined this ball of fire and shined like one thousand Suns. This fire ball of power reached the place where Gauri had shed her black skin and joining together the Goddess called Kathyayani arose. She got the face from the power of Mahendra, three eyes from the power of fire god, eighteen hands from the power of Vishnu, middle from the power of Indra, thighs and hips from the power of Varuna, two lotus like feet from the power of Brahma, fingers and toes of the feet from the power of Sun god, fingers of the hand from the powers of eight Vasus, teeth from the power of Prajapathis, nose from the power of Yakshas, ears from the power of Vayu (wind god). That Goddess was known all over the universe as Kathyayani.

Lord Shiva gave her his soolayudha (trident), Lord Vishnu gave her his Chakra (holy wheel), Varuna gave her his conch, Agni gave her his Vel (lance), Vayu gave her his bow, Sin gave her inexhaustible arrows, Indra gave her his Vajrayudha (Diamond weapon), Yama gave her sword, Lord Brahma gave her his beads of prayer, Moon gave her his white fans, Himalayas gave her a lion to ride, and so on. Kathyayani after receiving these offerings made a victory cry and climbed on the Lion and traveled to the top of Vindhya Mountain. Vindhya Mountain called her Koushiki and Sage Agasthya called her as Durga.

Mahishasura surrounded by his friends Raktha Bheeja, Chanda, Munda, Chikshura and Naraka came to Vindhya Mountain after conquering the entire world. There he saw Kathyayani and wanted to marry her. He sent his friend Dundhubhi as an emissary to Kathyayani. Kathyayani told him that she was willing to marry Mahisha, provided he defeated her in war. (Similar story about Shumbha and Nishumbha and their emissary is Sugreeva as told in Devi Mahathmyam. But this story is from Devi Bhagwatham). After chanting the Manthra called Vishnu Panjara, taught to her by Lord Shiva, Kathyayani rode on the lion and fought with Mahishasura. Mahishasura opposed her

along with her friends. The goddess jumped down from the lion and killed most of his Rakshasa chiefs. Mahishasura transformed himself in to an elephant and attacked her. She then cut off his trunk. He then transformed himself in to a bison. The trident of Lord Shiva and the Chakra of Lord Vishnu and Vajrayudha of Indra sent by the goddess could not do anything to the Mahishasura. Devi jumped on the Buffalo form of Mahishasura and cut off his neck. Thus the great Mahishasura died.

### **Killing of Shumbha and Nishumbha**

After several years, Sage Kasypa got three great asura sons called Shumbha, Nishumbha and Namuchi through his wife-Dhanu. Namuchi fought with Indra but the battle was halted due to a treaty between them. Namuchi was living in water and Indra who was hiding in the foam of water killed him using his Vajrayudha. Shumbha and Nishmbha became very angry at Indra. They waged a battle against heaven and defeated all devas and Dig palakas. They plundered all the great treasures of heaven and descended to the earth. There they met Rakthabheeja. He told them, " Dear Sirs, I am Rakthabheeja, who was the minister of Mahishasura, who was killed by Goddess Kathyayani. Two of my friends Chanda and Munda are hiding inside the sea." At this time Chanda and Munda also came there. Shumbha and Nishumbha sent their minister Sugreeva as an emissary to Goddess Kathyayani and asked her to become wife of one of them. She again told that him that she would marry only the one who defeated her.

Shumbha and Nishumbha sent Doomraksha, one of their chieftains to drag and bring Goddess Kathyayani to their presence. Doomraksha and his army were made into ash, by an angry breath of the Goddess. Then they sent an army of one crore Asuras, led by Chanda and Munda to bring the goddess. Kathyayani assumed the fierce form of Chamunda and killed both Chanda and Munda. Then Rakthabheeja led an army. One drop of blood falling from Rakthabheeja produced another Rakthabheeja. So when Kathyayani waged a war against him, several Rakthabheeja's were produced. Then Chamunda simply swallowed all blood that fell from his body and he was killed. Nishmbha then opposed her with a very vast army. Then she created seven forms out of her own self called Brahmani, Maheswari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi and Narasimhi. (They along with Chamundi are called Saptha Mathas-seven mothers). Together they killed Nishmbha and his army. Later Shumbha also was killed.

## **Meenakshi**

Malayadwaja Pandya was the son of Kulashekara Pandya. He married Kanchanamala the daughter of Soora Sena. Kanchanamala was in her previous birth a Vidhyadhara Maiden, who did Thapas to Goddess Parvathi and requested her to be born as her daughter. But Malayadwaja and Kanchanamala could not beget any children. So they did Puthra Kameshti and from the fire raised a three year old girl, who sat on the lap of Kanchanamala. She had three breasts. When the queen and king were worried about this, they heard the heavenly voice telling them that the third breast will vanish, when this child meets her husband.

This child was named as Thatathagai and brought up like a son. King Malayadwaja made Thatathagai as the ruler of Madurai and renamed her as Meenakshi. Meenakshi waged a war against the earth and the heaven. She defeated all of them and reached the portals of Kailasa. She first defeated Lord Nandi, who ran to Lord Shiva and informed him about his defeat.

Lord Shiva then came in the form of a handsome king called Sundareswara. As soon as Meenakshi saw him, her third breast disappeared. Later Meenakshi married Sundareswara. Her hand was given to Sundareswara by Lord Vishnu and the Vedic ceremonies were performed by Lord Brahma. Both of them ruled Madurai for a very long time.

## **Maha Pratyangira Devi**

To kill Hiranya kasipu and to protect his devotee Prahlada, Lord Vishnu took the awesome form of Narasimha (half lion and half man) and came out of a pillar. He took Hiranyakasipu to the main door of the palace and killed him on its steps. Then he drank the blood of Hiranyakasipu. Because of this he became very violent. Many efforts were done by Devas to appease him, but of no avail.

Lord Shiva took the form of Sharabha, with the lion, eagle and human body. His two wings were Shulini and Pratyangira, who were both forms of Goddess Parvathi. He tried his best to calm down Lord Narasimha and failed. Shulini also tried her best and failed.

Then arose from Sharabha, the awesome and terrible form of Pratyangira. Commonly she is pictured as having a female body and Lions head. Some others say that, she had 1000 heads. She succeeded in appeasing Narasimha. She is also called Atharva Bhadrakali because she is the protector of Atharvana Veda which deals about manthras, thanthras and Yanthras.

"In some images she is shown as dark complexion, terrible in aspect, having a lion's face with reddened eyes and riding a lion, entirely nude or wearing black garments, she wears garland of human skulls; her hair strands on end, and she holds a trident, a serpent in the form of a noose, a hand-drum and a skull in her four hands. Sri Pratyangira Devi is also associated with Sri Chakra. She is considered to be a powerful repellent of the influences generated by witch-craft. In Sri Chakra worship, she protects the devotees against all odds and guides him/her along the right path."

## **Annapurna**

She is the form of Parvathi who gave alms to Lord Shiva himself. There are two stories about the need of Lord Shiva to beg for alms.

In the popular one, this was necessitated because he plucked one head of Lord Brahma in anger. This skull stuck to his hand and refused to budge. He was told that unless he uses the skull of Lord Brahma as a begging bowl, it will not leave his hands. Parvathi took the Form of Annapurna and gave alms to Lord Shiva.

In the story that is popular in south, it is believed that once Lord Shiva went in to Daruka Vana where several sages lived with their wives. He took an extremely handsome form called Bhikshandar and tempted the wives of those sages. When they came to know about it, they cursed him that he would become a beggar. He became one and was excused once he received alms from his own wife Annapurna.

## **Goddess Kanyakumari**

Once there was an Asura called Banasura. He did thapas to Lord Shiva and got a boon that he could only be killed by a virgin Goddess. Parvathi was born as a girl in the south India and when she grew up, she waged a war and killed Banasura. Then a marriage was arranged between her and Lord Shiva. But Since Lord Shiva from Sucheendram a nearby temple town did not arrive at the appointed time, she turned all the food prepared for marriage in to stones and sand and decided to remain as a virgin goddess.

## **Shakambhari**

There was a great Rakshasi called Durgam. She pleased Lord Brahma through penance and requested him to give a boon that all the poojas, Thapas and religious observations done in the world would reach her instead of the Gods. She started tormenting the world and also Gods became powerless because of her. The world was afflicted by a big famine which lasted for one hundred years. Durgam also stole the four Vedas.

Those sages, who had taken in the caves of Himalayas, kept on praying Goddess Parvathi. She at last appeared in the form of Sathakshi (the hundred eyed). Since she was carrying all the food needed for them in the form of vegetables and fruits, she was also called Shakambari. Seeing that her devotees were starving she became sad and cried. Her tears became great rivers which flowed from the Himalaya Mountains. Then she fought with Durgam and killed her. She recovered the Vedas and again gifted them to the world.

Retold by P. R. Ramachander

## King who Gave his Name to Earth

In the royal lineage of Dhruva, there was a king called Anga. He married Suneetha who was the daughter of Yama, the god of death. Suneetha was a very cruel woman and used to beat and punish all people. Once she went to the forest and saw a Gandharwa, Sushankha, the son of Gethakolahala. Sushankha was doing penance in the forest. He was extremely pretty and a great adept in music. Suneetha was very much attracted towards him, but he did not respond to his overtures. She started troubling him. But Sushankha being good excused all this.

One day she beat him black and blue. Sushankha told her, "This is not befitting a lady. You should not do this." Suneetha replied, "I am the daughter of God of death and I will also punish like him." When she told about this incident to her father, he simply kept quiet. This made Suneetha angrier and she again started beating Sushankha. Infuriated he cursed her, "The Son who will be born to you would be a great sinner and all his life he would trouble Devas and Brahmins."

Suneetha never bothered about this curse and a son was born to her. She called him Vena.

Vena was an extremely cruel man and started troubling all his subjects as well as the great saints living in his kingdom. He told them, "From now on you should not offer any fire sacrifices to Gods. If you are particular you can do them to please me." Though the saints told him that fire sacrifices would please the gods and they would shower their blessings on him and his country, he simply did not listen to them. Then the sages killed him by using a Durbha grass which was made a weapon by their holy chants.

Since there was no king or government, the entire country suffered under bad people and robbers. So all the people approached the sages and requested them to create a king for them. The Saints then churned the left hand of the dead Vena. From his left hand a black short individual emerged. He was the personification of sins committed by Vena. The saints named him as Nishadha and asked him to hunt for his living.

Then the saints churned the right hand of Vena. From his right hand emerged, a divine boy armed with bow and arrows as well as the holy wheel. The saints and devas called him Prathu and made him the king to rule over all the earth. A holy bow called Ajagavam and armour fell from the heaven for his use. The seas brought lot of precious gems for his carnation. Lord Brahma found the mark of holy wheel on his right hand and recognized him as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

He integrated the people who were troubled and divided by his father and was called as "Raja" (He who integrates). He was so great that the ocean gave way to him whenever he wanted to cross and mountains became small allowing him to cross. The two poets created by Lord Brahma named as Sootha and Magadha praised him as follows "This king will always tell the truth, would stick to his oaths, would be charitable and a personification of all good characters."

Prathu faced a major problem. During the misrule of his father, all the plants and trees were drawn in to the earth by the goddess of earth and there was nothing to eat for any being. Prathu hunted for the goddess earth, which took the form of a cow and started running. Prathu followed the goddess, wherever she went. Tired of the chase, Prathu decided to shoot an arrow at the Cow (Goddess). She asked him, "Oh king, why are you trying to kill me, who am a lady?" The king replied, "The shastras permit killing of anyone who does evil deeds and you are killing my people by starving them." The cow replied, "When you kill me, they won't have a place to stay." The king replied, "I would create a place for their stay by my divine powers." Then the cow who was earth told him, "I will give back all the plants and food to you in the form of milk. You can milk me for them, after creating a calf for me."

Prathu saw that the mountains were everywhere and with their being scattered everywhere cultivation was not possible. So he drew the mountains together and created groups of mountains leaving lot of plain land. He then made Swayambhuva Manu as a calf and milked the Cow Earth. Through this he got back all the plant and animal systems. Because of this he became the father of earth and the earth because of him was called Pruthvi.

Prathu then became the emperor of the entire earth and looked after his subjects which included all beings properly. After reaching the ripe old age Prathu retired to the forests leaving the Earth to his son Vijithaswa. After a hoary penance he merged with God.

# Thulasi - Holy Plant

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Retold By P. R. Ramachander

Thulasi (*ocimum sanctum*) is possibly the holiest plant for the Hindus. There is a story in Devi Bhagavatam about her.

Long long ago, Lord Vishnu had three wives viz., Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Ganga. (I have verified this in several sources.) One day Ganga looked at Lord Vishnu with lot of passion when the other two were present. A big quarrel erupted between them. When Saraswathi attacked Ganga, Lakshmi tried to separate them. Saraswathi got infuriated and cursed Lakshmi that she should be born as a plant in earth. Ganga cursed Saraswathi that she should become a river and Saraswathi in turn cursed Ganga that she should become an ever flowing river.

Lakshmi, who was loved a lot by Lord Vishnu, told her, "Please do not worry. You would be first born as a daughter of a very pious soul called Dharma Dwaja and later marry an Asura called Shanka Chooda, who would be one of my incarnations. Later you would come and join me in Vaikunta after becoming the holy plant Thulasi."

There was a great king called Rudra Savarni, in his clan was born a great king called Vrusha Dwaja. Vrusha Dwaja was a very great devotee of Lord Shiva. Because of this he banned worship of all other Gods except Lord Shiva in his kingdom. Due to non-worship of Goddess Lakshmi during the Kanya (October-November) month, there was a great famine in his country.

Apart from that Lord Surya, who was also not worshipped, cursed the king that he would become a wretch. This infuriated Lord Shiva. He sent his Trident against Lord Surya. Lord Surya, afraid of Shiva's trident ran to his father Kashyapa Prajapathi for help. Since he was not in a position to help, both of them approached Lord Brahma. He also expressed his helplessness to protect Lord Surya and all of them together went to meet Lord Vishnu. Lord Shiva also came there. Then Lord Vishnu pointed out that since the time of Deva's was very much different, thousands of years have passed in the earth and Vrusha Dwaja was no more. He requested Lord Shiva to take back his trident.

Then Lord Vishnu told them that in the clan of Vrusha Dwaja, two kings viz., Dharma Dwaja and, Kusa Dwaja were remaining and both of them were doing extreme penance to Goddess Lakshmi so that she would bless their kingdom. Goddess Lakshmi appeared before them and blessed them saying that she would be born as daughter to them and with this their country would become fertile and rich.

Kusa dwaja married a lady called Malawathi and a daughter Veda Vathi was born to them. When Veda Vathi was doing Thapas (penance), Ravana tried to rape her. She cursed Ravana that if he touches any lady without their consent his head will break in to thousand pieces. She then jumped in to the sacrificial fire and died. Ravana took the ashes of the fire, put them in a box and threw it in the sea. This box was swept ashore in the kingdom of Mithila and was found by Janaka. Vedavathi was inside the box in the form of a girl child. She was called Sita, who later became the wife of Lord Rama.

Dharma dwaja married a lady called Madhawi and Goddess Lakshmi was born to them as a girl child. Since she was an incomparable beauty, they called her Thula Si (Incomparable one). Thulasi grew up in to lady as soon as she was born and left her kingdom and started doing Thapas in Bhadrinath with a wish to marry Lord Vishnu. She did Thapas in the middle of fire all round her in summer and under water in winter. She did Thapas for twenty four thousand years eating only fruits. Another thirty six thousand years eating only leaves, another forty four thousand years eating only air and the last ten thousand years without eating anything.

Lord Brahma, appeared before her and asked her what she wanted. She told him that she wanted to become the wife of Lord Vishnu. Lord Brahma told her, "Hey Thulasi, Lord Sudhama who was a part of Lord Krishna is now born as an Asura called Shanka Chooda. He is a part incarnation of Lord Vishnu. You would first become his wife. Later you would become the wife of Lord Narayana. While going back, a part of you would remain in this world as a holy plant called Thulasi. Any worship which does not include worship with the leaves of Thulasi would be incomplete and would not be accepted by Gods."

Shanka Chooda at that time had pleased Lord Brahma by his Thapas and was given a Vishnu kavacha (armour) and a boon that unless the armour is removed from his body and till his wife loses her virtue (Pathivruthya), nobody can kill him. Shanka Chooda requested Thulasi to marry him and both were married. They lead an extremely happy life. This time Shanka Chooda started giving trouble to the Devas. Devas accompanied by Lord Shiva approached Lord Vishnu for a solution. Lord Vishnu gave his spear to Lord Shiva so that he can break the Vishnu Kavacha, which Shanka Chooda was wearing.

When Lord Shiva and Shanka Chooda were engaged in a fierce battle and Lord Vishnu assumed the form of Shanka Chooda and went to Shanka Chooda's palace. When they entered the bed room Thulasi started suspecting Lord Vishnu. Then Lord Vishnu took his real form and told her, "Lakshmi, you have been doing great penance to marry me. By Now Shanka Chooda would have been killed by Lord Shiva and it is time for you to leave this body and come as Lakshmi to Vaikunta and be with me. Your body which

you leave here will become a great river called Gandaki and your hair would transform itself in to a holy plant Thulasi. This plant would become the holiest among plants."

Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi returned to Vaikunta.

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